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by David Finkelhor, Ph.D.

An address presented (in French) at the
Symposium* on Child Sexual Abuse
sponsored by RIFAS in Ottawa,
May 24 and 25, 1987



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Before I begin, I have a warning to give you about myself: as you may know, I am a sociologist and a researcher and I have had very, very little clinical experience actually dealing with this problem, unlike many of yourselves. This is my "caveat emptor" before I launch my talk. I am the "armchair", "ivory tower" person in this field. Unfortunately, relationships between us in the research end of things, and those in the clinical end of things have not always been cordial. Regrettable as this is, I think I know why it has happened.

I have a little parable that I think conveys something about the kind of relationship that researchers often have with practitioners, and why they run into difficulty with one another. It involves a man who was hiking in the woods, when suddenly he found himself chased by a grizzly bear. In his panic he began to run for dear life and didn't notice that he was coming to a precipice until he fell over the edge, and found himself falling and falling. He thrashed about to try and save himself, and finally managed to grab onto a branch that was protruding from the side of the cliff. There he hung until he caught his breath. Then he looked down and noticed there was another thousand feet of cliff below him. So he looked up, and the edge of the cliff that he had fallen over was 500 feet above him, straight up. No way to get back up. Then he noticed that the branch he was holding was slipping out from the side of the cliff. In desperation, he looked up at the sky and said, "Is anyone up there?" Suddenly there was a deep, rumbling voice that boomed out of the clouds. "Yes, my son you are in my good hands. All be well. Just let go of the branch". He looked down to the bottom of the cliff a thousand feet below, and then up at the sky again, saying, "Anyone else?"

Now, many people in their clinical work can readily identify with the man who, chased by a grizzly bear, falls over the cliff. There are crises and emergencies that you have to deal with continually, and people in the practice world often cry out for help from people in the research field. But when what we researchers have to offer is so utopian and abstract, so divorced from your reality and when it requires a kind of blind faith in the judgments or the assumptions of researchers, it is no wonder that many people in the practice world end up calling out for "somebody else", "anybody else". I hope that won't be your reaction after hearing some of the things that I have to say today.

NEW MYTHS

What I am going to do today is address some topics where I think research has revealed that we have developed some new myths and misconceptions about the problem of sexual abuse. For a long

time, maybe even today, people would come to lecture about sexual abuse and the first thing they would do is "debunk the myths". You know these "myths": that sexual abusers are strangers with hair on their palms and black raincoats. That children do lie about having been sexually abused, and so forth. I'm sure you've heard somebody give that particular talk. Well I think in the course of debunking some of those old myths, we have developed a set of new myths about sexual abuse, and I want to talk about some of those. This problem is turning out to be far more complicated, and also more interesting than we previously thought.

Myth #1

The first "new myth" that I want to address is the idea that we are currently experiencing an epidemic of sexual abuse. And not just that we are experiencing an epidemic of sexual abuse, but also that the epidemic is somehow a reflection of some particular kind of moral failing or moral degeneracy in our current society that is responsible for what's going on.

Well, this is not true. Fortunately, we are beginning to have research now that can give us some perspective on the historical evolution of the problem.

Now it is easy to see where the epidemic idea comes from. One of the things I am sure you all know is that we have had an enormous increase in the last 15 years in the number of sexual abuse cases that are coming to public attention. In 1976, for example, in the U.S., we had an estimated 7,000 cases of sexual abuse that were known to professionals nationwide. Last year that number was up to about 120,000 and growing at the rate of about 10 - 15% per year. My impression is that the Canadian experience has been quite similar. Of course we didn't know whether those cases represented a true explosion of sexual abuse or just the uncovering of sexual abuse that wasn't previously being uncovered. Now we can begin to answer that question. We have a number -- over a dozen now -- surveys of adults, which have asked them about sexual abuse experiences that occurred in their childhood. And what we can do in each of these surveys is compare the people who are in their 50's and 60's, for example, to the people who are in their 20's. That gives us a perspective for example on whether people who grew up in the 1920's and 1930's were less likely to be abused than say people who grew up in the 1950's and 1960's. We can look at whether the rates of sexual abuse reported by people in that earlier period are greater or less.

The surveys are not uniform in what they find, but overall they do not show very great differences between the younger and older cohorts. Some show somewhat more in the younger cohort, some show somewhat more in the older cohort. But looking across

all these surveys there is no evidence for a massive increase in sexual abuse in the recent historical period. What they all show is very, very sobering: that there has been a large amount of sexual abuse occurring in the lives of children as far back as we can find. The study that I cite most often, because it's the only national sample for the U.S. that we have, is a study that was done in the summer of 1985 by the Los Angeles Times Poll. This study found that 27% of the women in the United States and 15% of the men had been sexually abused at some point in their childhood. The equivalent survey in Canada, the one done for the Badgley Commission, found similar rates. Obviously these are very impressive figures.

Now, in spite of the size of these figures, I am actually of the rather heretical opinion that sexual abuse is decreasing. I say this in part as a kind of devil's advocate to make people think a little about some of the issues involved. But in the long term, the really long term, in other words one hundred or two hundred years, I would bet that we have experienced a long term decline in the amount of sexual abuse. I think sexual abuse is probably another one of those problems like poverty, for example, which we began to notice when it was no longer completely endemic in society, and had started a decline. Unfortunately, we don't have statistics, but I base this opinion on the research that has been done on the history of childhood. Perhaps some of you are familiar with this research. It shows that if you really go back two hundred years, and you study the conditions of childhood, you see that children lived in terrible degradation. You realize that there was no special status for children. That children were basically treated as small grown-ups, little adults and subjected to all the kinds of demands and rigors that adults would suffer. Children were indentured to merchants and other families. They were allowed to work in very onerous, almost slave-like working conditions, subjected to a great deal of physical punishment and brutality. They were often confined within the realm of their family for extended periods of time without contact with other people. They were married off at a very early age. Children, in part because they were so likely to die, were considered a much more expendable commodity by their parents and in many parts of the Western world there was much less concern about protecting children than we see today.

Now, along with this kind of degraded status which children occupied, I think there was undoubtedly a great deal of abuse and misuse of all sorts that went on. Some of the historical accounts of people's childhoods from these periods reveal that kind of treatment. Since that time, however, we have seen major social changes in the way children are treated, particularly in the last hundred years: for example, compulsory education, the development of the idea of child protection, the reduction in the number of children born into a single family, the increase in knowledge about child development and child rearing, the increase

in the age at first marriage, the special status that is accorded children. All these have undoubtedly worked to improve the lives of children a great deal. I feel relatively confident that with all that general improvement, the amount of capricious sexual misuse of children has also declined as well. It went from something that happened to all children to something that happened to only some. So I think we need to really take the long term perspective and consider that we may have already made progress without knowing it.

Myth #2

Now here is a second part of the myth: sexual abuse is a reflection of some particularly serious kind of moral decay that is going on in our society. It is a sign of degeneracy. We hear frequently the idea that sexual abuse is associated with the breakup of a nuclear family, and with the increase of pornography and with the rise of the sexual revolution. We get the idea that this is the "wages of sin", the price that we are paying for some of these social changes. Well this is not true either. If the data suggest that it hasn't really been increasing, of course then it does undercut that argument. But there are also some specific things that we forget about when we make these kinds of alarmist claims about moral decay. For example, the so-called breakup of the nuclear family: it is true that children are today more likely to experience divorce during the course of their childhood. And the fact that they might be more likely to live with a step-parent today than a generation ago, may increase their risk of sexual abuse to some extent. Research shows that children are more at risk for sexual abuse when they live with a step-parent. But, by the same token, the greater availability of divorce means that a mother is no longer condemned to live, to cohabit with a man who is treating her and her children in a callous and brutal way. She can leave that man more easily than was true a generation ago. She can get a divorce. Undoubtedly, millions of children have been protected from abuse by the fact that families are no longer the undissolvable unit that they were thought of one or two generations ago.

Similarly, with the sexual revolution. The change has been both good and bad. Undoubtedly the changing of sexual mores, the confusion about proper sexual values may have to some extent created situations where some children are more vulnerable to predatory adults. But the changes have also created the new climate which has allowed us to identify this problem and publicize it. The sexual revolution has also allowed us to provide better education to children and to adults about sexuality in general. That has meant more fulfilling sex lives for adults so that they do not prey on children. I don't think that we could simply argue that the sexual revolution is responsible for what is going on. It has both exacerbated and ameliorated the problem, but not created it. This is the

perspective that leads me to say that we shouldn't think of this problem as a result of some kind of moral degradation. What I do think it results from I will talk about later on.

Myth #3

Here is another thing that one hears very frequently about sexual abuse these days that seems to me to be a new myth: sexual abuse, according to this idea, is not really about sex, it is about the abuse of authority, about the abuse of power. Perhaps you've heard this idea, I know where it comes from.

When feminists first began to talk about the problem of rape back in the middle 70's, there were a lot of misconceptions about rape. One of the most prominent ones was that something about the victim somehow provoked the rape: she was dressed in a sexy way or she aroused some kind of irresistible lust in the rapist. The advocates for rape victims wanted to point out, first, that old women, middle aged women, women of all sorts were subject to rape. It wasn't something about the sexual qualities of the victim that caused the rape. But even more important than that, advocates pointed out that rape from the victim's point of view wasn't experienced as anything like a sexual act. There were old, awful jokes like, "If rape is inevitable, just lie back and enjoy it." These simply did not fathom the fact that for rape victims, the experience was not about sex but about violation, assault, humiliation. It had nothing to do with sexual pleasure what so ever. That was a very important point.

When people came along and started to talk sexual abuse, they incorporated some of that thinking from the discussions about rape. And I think it was appropriate to some extent in that it did emphasize that it wasn't sexual characteristics of the children that somehow provoked the sexual abuse, or that it wasn't experienced by the children as sexual stimulation or gratification. But I think an important misconception got developed when people said that sexual abuse was not about sex, because it is. When sexual abusers are interviewed and talk about what they have done, they describe being attracted to the smooth skin, the hairless bodies of children, and their small stature. There are definitely strong erotic components that these men show when they describe why it is that they get sexually involved with children. If abusers were just motivated by the need to be powerful, they would simply beat up the children, or intimidate and order them around. But they do more than that. They want to touch and fondle them, and play with their sex organs. I think that what we need to say is that sexual abuse has both erotic and non-erotic components to it, sexual motivations and non-sexual motivations, and we need to understand both of them.

Part of the misconception has to do with how we think about

conventional sex. We have a mistaken notion that somehow ordinary conventional sex between husbands and wives springs from pure sexual motivation, that it doesn't have anything else attached to it. Well that's not true. All sexual behaviour is a mixture of sexual and non-sexual motivations. Even in sex between husbands and wives, there is always some desire for a confirmation of your masculinity or femininity, a desire to feel powerful, a desire not to feel lonely or to feel wanted, and there are often times when many other less attractive kinds of non-sexual motivations come into play. So in that sense, sexual abuse is really no different from other kinds of sexual behaviour. It has both sexual and non-sexual motivations involved, and it so happens that some of these non-sexual motivations are ones that make children of particular interest. But sexual abuse is indeed very much about sex.

Myth #4

Now there is still another misconception about the motivation of sexual abusers. I'm sure this is going to raise a lot of hackles, but I have a somewhat different perspective on this than many people. Probably the idea that most of us have learned and the thing that most of us say these days when we are asked, "Why would someone sexually abuse a child?" is "Because they were sexually abused themselves when they were children." This has become the explanation of sexual abuse that one hears in the newspaper and from professionals. It is practically second nature to people. And I think that we have created a very dangerous misconception, one that is not really supported by the research, by creating a simple equation between having been victimized as a child and becoming an abuser.

Let me tell you what I think the research actually shows. There have been a dozen or so studies, mostly of convicted and incarcerated sex offenders that show that anywhere from 20% to 60% of these men were sexually abused when they were children. This seems like a lot of victimization. But one of the problems is that these particular samples on which most of this research has been done are hardly typical of the child molester, sexual abuser population.

You probably all know enough about how the system works to appreciate how untypical they are. First of all, the vast majority of sexual abuse never gets reported, so those offenders obviously are not part of this group. Then of those that get reported, less than a third of the offenders actually get caught and brought into the criminal justice system. Of these, the number that actually get convicted may represent another third. Then of those that get convicted, only a minority actually end up incarcerated or in a treatment program. Now the important fact is that those who get incarcerated are not representative of other molesters. The ones who end up incarcerated are the ones

who are the most repetitive, the most disadvantaged, the most socially unattractive and the ones with the least resources. If you are an upstanding citizen who has a good job, someone who has friends and money, it is very likely that your denial that you did anything is going to be believed. Even if you do get convicted, the chances you will be sent to jail are very low. So "normal" types of child molesters do not get into these studies. It seems to me very likely that the repetitive and pathological offenders who do end up in these samples, the ones who offended in connection with other kinds of criminal activities and so forth, these are going to be the offenders who come from the most damaged kinds of childhoods. They will be the ones more likely than others to have been sexually abused as a child.

Now I don't want to go to the other extreme. I don't want to say that there is no relationship between having been abused and becoming an abuser. I think indeed that there is some relationship. I think that if you have been abused, you probably are at a higher risk of becoming an abuser. But I don't think that this explains even a majority of the sexual abuse that occurs. I think that when we actually study the full spectrum of abusers, and are able to find out about their childhoods, we'll probably find out that maybe 20 to 30% of them were sexually abused when they were children. But then we still have these other 70% for whom we have no theoretical explanation.

One thing that is terribly dangerous about this particular theory, is that it gives a misleading idea to children who themselves have been victimized and also to their families, about the true risk of becoming an abuser, based on the fact that they themselves were victimized. We now have a whole generation of victims who are very badly frightened, and their parents too, that they are destined to become abusers because, as everyone knows, "victims become abusers".

The reality is much more complicated than that. Obviously, even to the extent that there is a relationship, it is a relationship based on a lot of contingencies. That is, it is not simply having been abused that leads you to become an abuser, but there are other things that have to be added to the formula as well. A good illustration of how true this is, is the fact that we have more female victims than male victims, by a ratio of 2 to 1, and yet we have more male abusers than we have female abusers. If it were a simple relationship that being a victim led to being an abuser, we would expect to have many more female abusers than we do. We actually have few female abusers. So obviously one contingency is you have to be a victim and a man. Or I would say more specifically, you have to be a victim and learn a lot of the things that men learn about how unmasculine it is to be a victim, how damaging it is to your image of what it means to be a real man, and how a man should never talk about a painful experience like this with anybody else. One of the contingencies that turns

victims into abusers is that men learn that the way in which to recoup their sense of masculinity after having been victimized is to lord it over others, to take power over others, or to degrade others. We don't have research on this yet, but my guess is that we will find it's the people who were victimized, and who were most humiliated by the experience, and who were never able to talk about it, and who also learned that you recover from a humiliating experience by humiliating others. It will require all those kinds of contingencies before the experience of being victimized leads to the experience of becoming an abuser. So the idea that people become abusers simply because they are victims is a new myth. Most victims end up vowing never to let what happened to them happen to anyone else.

Myth #5

Still another myth about sexual abuse has to do with the way in which we have been talking about its effects on victims. The misconception that many people currently have, based on education, that people even like myself have been doing over the last few years, is that sexual abuse inevitably results in long term trauma, that it is always a ticking time-bomb. I don't think that's true.

I want to explain this a little bit, since it is important to have some background about this, and to understand what the best research shows. A very good study was done recently by Chris Bagley at the University of Calgary, a survey of 500 randomly selected women in the Calgary community, of whom about 100 had been sexually victimized when they were children. He did a fairly intensive study of their current mental health and functioning. What he found was that if you had been victimized as a child, you were at least twice as likely as another woman to suffer from depression, to suffer from alcoholism or drug abuse, to have an episode of psychiatric hospitalization or to have some other kind of mental health problem. So it was clear that having been victimized put you at risk for psychiatric disturbance later on in life. But the study also found that over 50% of the women who had been victimized were functioning very well. They were indistinguishable from the other women by conventional measures of mental health. Thus maybe 20% of the abuse victims had acute problems, which was twice the rate for the women who had never been victimized, but it was still a minority of all victims. I think that we need to keep both of those perspectives in mind: that abuse does increase risk, but that the majority of victims recover from the experience. We don't recognize this second part enough.

The reason why we have developed this misconception has to do with the politics of the problem of sexual abuse. We have been involved in a campaign for the last ten years to try to get

people to take this problem seriously. This has been a problem that people have tended to ignore or deny or dismiss. And one of the things that we have been saying to people is, "Look, this is a very serious problem and has very serious effects." And we have been busy doing research trying to show the connection between sexual abuse and a whole range of other long term effects, such as alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, depression, multiple personality, eating disorders and so forth. We have been very effective, and now we have a lot of evidence that shows those kinds of connections.

This has been a hard job to try and convince the politicians and the policy makers and many times our own colleagues in our own field, that this is a serious problem. But, because of our need to impress upon people how important it is, we failed to pay enough attention to the fact that sexual abuse is also a kind of trauma that people can recover from and recover from at high rates. This fact was embarrassing to our campaign, so we did not publicize it. But, the reason why I stress this is that I think we haven't been aware of the fact that there is another very important audience for all of our publicity. Our publicity not only reaches the politicians and policy makers, it reaches the victims themselves and their families. Unfortunately, what they have been hearing for many years is that sexual abuse dooms them to this long list of psychiatric problems. They also need to know that people recover from sexual abuse, that people who have been sexually abused grow up to become politicians, poets, doctors and lawyers and social workers, happily married people, and people who are functioning relatively well in their lives. We have to keep both possibilities in mind and not talk about sexual abuse as though it inevitably involves deep long term effects.

Finally, I want to raise one other issue with you. I want to tell you about a piece of research I have done recently, that has helped me a lot in thinking about this problem. We have known for a long time that the prevalence of sexual abuse victimization is very great. The fact that there are so many victims should lead us to think that in fact there must be a lot of perpetrators as well. But we haven't had any research on how widespread that is. In a national study in the U.S. in 1985, we did a little experiment to try and see if we could get some idea about how many people had actually molested a child at some time. Of course this is a very difficult kind of thing to do as you can imagine.

We used a technique called the "Randomized Response Technique" to help give some additional protection and anonymity to respondents. The way it works is this: in these telephone interviews, the interviewer says, "Now I'm going to ask you a question that is very sensitive, but we have devised it in such a way that even I won't know what your answer to the question is.

I want you to take a coin out and I'm going to ask you two questions. You are going to flip the coin and depending on whether you get a heads or tails, you are going to answer one or the other question and I won't know which one you are answering. Now the first question I am going to ask you is, "Have you ever sexually abused a child at any time in your life?" and the second question is, "Do you rent the place where you live or not? Now flip a coin and if you get a heads I want you to answer the first question and if you get a tails answer the second question." Now the interesting thing about this technique is that the researchers know what the probability of the person answering each question is, because the coin flip will be 50/50. And we have other ways of knowing what percentage of the population has the characteristic of renting as opposed to say owning the place where they live. So we can figure out, not which person was responding to which question, but overall how many people in the sample as a whole were responding "yes" to the question, "Have you ever sexually abused a child at some time in your life?" What we found in that study -- it was a little bit more complicated than I described -- we found that 10% of the men who were responding to the question, "Have you ever sexually abused a child at anytime in your life?" in effect had said "Yes". Although this is an impressive number of individuals, I think it is also not far from what I would have expected. The same study showed that a quarter of all children are sexually abused, and our figures on the number of children abused by each abuser are somewhere between 2 and 4 children per abuser. The idea that 10% of the male population may have been involved in sexually abusing children at sometime, does not seem to me to be impossible. But it does raise a question about what is going on. If it is not some kind of moral degeneracy in our society, as I said earlier, just what is it?

MALE SOCIALIZATION

I see this problem in the perspective of male socialization and I think that we need to look at it in terms of male socialization. In other words, I would urge that we analyze the problem in terms of sociological concepts, rather than thinking about it simply in terms of the kind of damaging childhood experiences that someone might have had that led them to commit these kinds of acts, because obviously we are talking about a lot of people who are doing this, a lot of people who are not all that different from everybody else. We have to begin to understand that it is the way that everybody is growing up that puts them at risk of engaging in this kind of behaviour.

Sexualization of Emotional Expression

I have identified three things about male socialization that seem to me to be particularly important in my understanding of why the problem is so widespread. The first has to do with

something I call the "sexualization of emotional expression". For a great many, if not most men in our society, as a result of the way we are brought up, we have a very difficult time divorcing sexual behaviour from a large number of other emotional needs and expressions. This goes back to the way in which we are treated as young boys, when we are deprived of the opportunity to be cuddled, to be dependent, to be needy, to be nurtured at an early age (before we're really ready to make that transition), and then we're really offered the opportunity to get those needs met later on as adolescents and adults through sexual relationships. So when men are feeling needy, are feeling lonely, or when they want to be close, the only vehicle they have for getting those needs met is through sexual relationships. This is the only way you can get those needs met in a kind of masculine, manly way. And as a result, sexuality carries a whole enormous baggage for men.

We all understand these issues intuitively from our dating experiences. Women, for example, talk about how men don't want to be friends.. They just want to have sex. Part of the reason is that men have these other kinds of needs, but they have only learned about how to meet them through sexual relationships, so that when they have an opportunity, sex is the entry through which they get all these other needs met.

How does this relate to children? When men relate to children, it is very hard for them to have the kind of intimate, close relationships that children require without some of this sexual baggage coming along. That is, the closeness and intimacy that men have with children bring up these kinds of sexual feelings. It is partly because the men are reminded of some of their unmet needs by the way in which children themselves behave. But partly their own needs for these kinds of expressions get projected on the children.

Now what this means is that the problem is much broader than men becoming sexual with children and sexually abusing them. This sexualization of emotional needs comes out in other ways. There are a lot of men for whom these kinds of sexual feelings come up in relationships with children, and then they realize their inappropriateness. These men then distance themselves from children, they decide they are going to have very little to do with children, or they spend very little time with children. This is particularly responsible for the syndrome that you see of fathers who distance themselves from their adolescent daughters, when their daughters begin puberty. The closeness that these men could have with their children brings up sexual feelings that they have a hard time dealing with. These men run away. However, others succumb. For these men, the fantasies and the chance to satisfy those unmet emotional needs are so overwhelming that they can't resist the idea of actually putting them into practice. The idea gets more and more powerful and then they act

on these fantasies.

The Attraction Gradient

The second important element to masculine socialization that ties into sexual abuse has to do with what I call the "attraction gradient". This concerns the fact that we raise women in our society to find their appropriate sexual partner among persons who are older, larger and more powerful than themselves. And that puts children on the attraction gradient for men but not for women. It is not surprising that men who are being encouraged to find sexual partners from persons who are younger, smaller and less powerful than themselves, will find children to be sexually attractive because children are at the extreme of those various characteristics: they are young and small and weak. These characteristics in themselves come to have a very positive kind of sexual value, a sexual allure. Of course we see this in advertising, we see this in the movies. It is part of a broader set of cultural values and attitudes. Once again, it helps us understand more than the sexual abuse of children. For example, there is a lot of sexually inappropriate behaviour on the part of male doctors, therapists, and employers who become sexually involved with their patients, clients, and employees. Part of the problem is, of course, having the power and having the opportunity to sexually abuse and sexually exploit in those situations. But part of it has to do with the fact that the position of authority itself, the situation of being a powerful person in the presence of somebody who is weaker than yourself, has sexual allure by its very nature for many men. And so, too, the situation with children. Because children are young, small and weak they can become sexualized for a large number of men in our society.

Exemption From Caregiving Responsibilities

The third part of normal male socialization that contributes to sexual abuse has to do with the exemption that we give men from responsibility for the care of children. Men do not grow up believing and understanding that an important part of their role as they get older will be to take care of, to nurture and to watch out for children. One of the consequences is that many men have a very difficult time identifying with a child's point of view. Part of the problem, in fact, goes back to what I was talking about earlier. Men do not grow up to expect that they are going to have to take care of children. But, in addition, because they are deprived of the opportunity to be children at an early age, they get alienated from the "child inside themselves". So the opportunity to identify with children through being able to identify with the children in themselves is lost. In any case, we see this very frequently in sexual abusers. We see it for example in the kinds of things they say in the wake of abuse: "Well, gee, I don't see what I did that was wrong. I mean, I

didn't rape her. I didn't hurt her. It was just playful touching. I don't see why everyone should be so upset. I don't see what harm it did." Here you see an inability to recognize that the sexualization of a relationship with a child might be confusing, upsetting, painful to that child. There is an inability to identify with where that child is coming from and how that child might feel about being sexualized or being betrayed by the adult.

So these are three elements of normal male sexual socialization that I think put a lot of men at risk to potentially becoming sexual abusers. Obviously, there are some very important implications to my analysis about masculinity. But first of all, I don't want to imply that I think this is the whole problem. If there is one thing I have tried to do, it is to encourage people to take a very broad view of all the factors that are involved in the sexual abuse of children and male sexual socialization is only one factor. There are other very important factors at the level of the family and at the level of the individual. If you are interested in my more extensive analysis of that, you might look at my book Child Sexual Abuse. But I'm going to talk now just about the contribution of masculine socialization and some of the implications that it has. We need to think more seriously about the way in which we raise men and about how to change male socialization along these three dimensions I discussed. For example, in the area of meeting the emotional needs of boys, we have to be very careful to nurture in boys and allow space for these kinds of tender needs. We need to help them to enjoy and encourage them to be part of relationships that have a great deal of tenderness and nurturance and dependency, but that do not necessarily involve a sexual component. Those relationships can occur between boys and other boys as well as boys and girls.

On the issue of the attraction gradient, we very much need to see what we can do to encourage boys and men to choose their sexual partners from people who are of equal social status, equal intelligence, equal power and of course we have to encourage women to occupy those places in society as well, but it's important that men learn to find those aspects of women to be attractive and sexually stimulating.

Finally we need to encourage among men a greater identification with the needs and wellbeing of children. This is perhaps the most difficult and ironic objective, because the whole problem of sexual abuse has tended to force men further and further away from the realm of children. It is very hard today if you are a man to get a job working in a daycare centre. It is very hard if you are a teenage boy to get a job as a babysitter, because of the obvious concerns, the fully justified concerns that since boys are more likely to sexually abuse, having a boy take care of children increases the risk of abuse. Ironically,

it seems to me what we need to be doing is exactly the opposite: we have to be creating more opportunities for boys and men to take responsibilities for children. But obviously we can't do that in an abrupt or irresponsible or unthinking way because we certainly can increase the risk to children if we don't plan it fully. But underneath, we have to keep that perspective in mind, that what we are trying to do is to increase the ability of men to identify with the needs and the wellbeing of children.

The problem and its history really are very sobering to professionals and researchers, because they tell us that there are things that go on in the world of children that we can ignore and be unconscious of, unaware of and unsympathetic to, for the longest period of time. We had a century of social science and child development research and concern about child welfare, but it is really sobering to think that during all of that time, until maybe ten years ago, a problem of this magnitude and this scope was essentially undiscovered, although it was sitting right in front of us. It is even more ironic because we ourselves were all at sometime or another children. It is not as though we were talking about something that was happening to a weird ethnic minority out there that nobody knows much about.

What that points out is how easy it is for us to become alienated from our own experience of childhood. As I said, men have this problem to a greater extent, but I think all of us to some degree find that when we grow into being adults we forget about our childhood. We act like the nouveau riche who disown their origins and quickly pretend they were never immigrants or never poor themselves. We act as though we were never children ourselves. And the thought I would leave you with is that part of this whole process is becoming more open to the children within ourselves. As we learn more about and remember more about and pay more attention to the part of us that was a child and still is a child, then we will be better able to serve the needs of the real children we work with.

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